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SUBJECT: CEC CHAIRMAN AFFIRMS PREPARATIONS ON TRACK FOR MAY 13
RERUN ELECTIONS

REF: BAKU 315

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11. (SBU) On March 30 Ambassador made a farewell call on Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairman Mezahir Panahov. During the meeting, Ambassador urged Panahov to publicize the ten successful prosecutions of election fraud to date (reftel). Panahov agreed that it was important to inform people about the cases and said he would raise it with the President's office. Ambassador also expressed concern that some precincts have yet to post voter lists, despite the March 9 deadline for precincts to do so. Panahov responded that the CEC delivered the lists to the Constituency Election Commissions (ConEcs) in plenty of time and the ConEcs have all assured him lists are up. He said, however, that he would send his staff out personally to check the status of the lists following information provided by Post. Ambassador asked Panahov to ensure that domestic election observer organizations are allowed to register smoothly under the new law; Panahov replied that observer registration had always been smooth and would continue to be so. Panahov also confirmed that the process of acquiring and supplying the necessary finger ink to polling stations was going smoothly.

12. (SBU) Overall, Panahov agreed with Ambassador that the May 13 rerun elections need to be free and fair. He commented that Azerbaijan's mentality is slowly changing on this point and he expects fewer problems with local government interference in this campaign than the previous campaign. He said the President himself has reiterated to Panahov the need to run good elections, such that the international community would appreciate the results. Panahov affirmed that this was his approach and promised to do everything he could, together with the help of the USG.

HARNISH